After Charlie: The Unravelling of the French Republican Response

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ABSTRACT Starting with the assault on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* on 7 January 2015, the French Republic has endured a series of terrorist attacks culminating with the massacre of civilians on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, in an outrage deliberately and symbolically timed to coincide with the Bastille Day celebration of 14 July 2016. During this period, the governing and other elites in France have attempted to foster a sense of national unity around key republican values as the most effective response to the threat posed by terrorism. After examining the inconsistent postures struck by the French socialist government in the months following the outrages of 2015 and 2016, this article will analyse the contradictions of the previous administration in order to illustrate the argument that the problematic relationship between race, identity and secularism cuts across the traditional ideological cleavages of left and right. The failure of leading mainstream political figures to articulate an effective and unifying discourse in the face of the terrorist threat to France is not, however, purely a failure of communication. The article will address the adequacy of a blueprint for social cohesion shaped by the Third Republic and exemplified by the formal separation of church and state in 1905, and consider whether the traditional understanding of what it means to belong to the 'one and indivisible' republic has problematised the sense of national self-esteem and perpetuates the current tension in France.

KEYWORDS France Republic Terrorism Parties Left Right Intellectuals Minorities Identity

Introduction: after *Charlie*

The attack on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, on 7 January 2015, which left 12 dead, including one of France's most famous cartoonists, Cabu (Jean Cabut), was a tragedy that drew a unanimous response from the elites in France. The assault on one of the defining values of the Republic, freedom of expression, would be met by a monumental show of national unity around the principles of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. Overnight, symbolic evocations of the refusal to be silenced sprang up in the *espaces publics* or public places that have such significance in France, since it was in the metaphorical public space created by the revolution of 1789 that the republican sense of citizenship was forged.[1] Thus it was that all around the country and most impressively in Paris, on 11 January 2015, millions marched in a massive show of national unity, under banners proclaiming that they were also *Charlie*, brandishing giant pencils in homage to the slain journalists. And yet, within days, troubling reports emerged that in a number of schools there were pupils who openly challenged the mood of national unity, declaring they were not *Charlie*. The fact that this was happening in the institution that is supposed to be the privileged site for the inculcation of the nation's collective values, *l'école républicaine* or the state school system, was a cause for soul-searching among teachers and educational psychologists.[2] Would the French political elite be able to articulate a discourse that could succeed in engaging those troubled suburban constituencies notably absent from the mass mobilisations of January 2015? It was a challenge that prompted a remarkable admission from the highest level of government.

[1] Jurgen Habermas, *L'Espace public: archéologie de la publicité comme dimension constitutive de la société bourgeoise* (Paris: Payot 1988).

[2] Claire Leconte, 'Minute de silence pour "Charlie Hebdo" refusée par des élèves: on est tous responsables', *Nouvel Obs*, 14 January 2015. http://leplus.nouvelobs.com/contribution/1306128-minute-de-silence-pour-charlie-heb...

A discourse driven by events

Prime Minister Manuel Valls had already evoked, is a series of interviews published much earlier in his political career, that social segregation was something that was undeniably visible in certain parts of France.[3] In his New Year address to the press, however, on 20 January 2015, Valls made the unusually frank admission that the principle lodged in the preamble to the French constitution, namely that the Republic was one and indivisible, fell somewhat short of the social reality. The assumption that the collective values of the polity could bind citizens into one cohesive body was clearly inadequate: 'let's not talk of integration, let's forget the words that no longer mean much…we need to combat every day the dreadful feeling that there are second-class citizens…or some voices that matter less than others…a territorial, social and ethnic apartheid has descended on our country'. While acknowledging the emblematic and global significance of the slogan 'I am *Charlie*', Valls underlined that France could not be reduced to one message: 'France promotes freedom of expression everywhere, but it also defends other values which it holds dear: peace, the respect for deeply-held beliefs, and the dialogue between religions'.[4] The address seemed to mark a courageous departure from the usual assumption that the aspirations of the Republic for French society were achievable, if only the citizens could commit to them. Consequently, in March 2015, an inter-ministerial committee was created that would look into the various 'social fractures', in areas such as education, housing and employment, that might bear disproportionately on certain communities and act as a spur to radicalisation.

Within months, however, France was confronted by another inexplicably brutal act of terrorist violence visited by one resident of France on another, when Yassin Salhi decapitated his employer, Hervé Cornara, at their place of work in a quiet corner of the country called Isère on June 26. Interviewed on the current affairs programme *Le Grand Rendez-vous*, Valls was careful to warn the viewers against the dangers of listening to those he called the reactionary bloc, comprising some members of the mainstream right as well as the far right. They were the elements determined to divide populations, neighbourhoods and territories, as opposed to the majority of people in the country who wanted to preserve the values of the Republic. It was nonetheless noticeable that Valls framed his reference to the death of Hervé Cornara and other outrages in the same terms as those employed by the centre-right politician whom he had criticised in the past, Nicolas Sarkozy. For Valls, France was subject to a constant and permanent threat which it would have to combat over the long term. Like Sarkozy, Valls described the struggle against jihadism as a war which crystallised a clash of civilisations: 'We cannot afford to lose this war because it is essentially a clash of civilisations. We are defending our society, our civilisation and our values'.[5]

On the night of 13 November France was faced by a collective and violent loss of life on the streets of Paris the like of which it had not witnessed since the end of World War II. Terrorist attacks had left 90 dead at the Bataclan music theatre, 39 in neighbouring cafés and one at the Stade de France football ground. The scale of the attack and the extent of the loss of life left

[3] Virginie Malabard, *La laïcité en France* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 2005).
[4] *Lemonde.fr*, 'Manuel Valls évoque "un apartheid territorial, social, ethnique" en France', 20 January 2015. http://www.lemonde.fr/polique/article/2015/01/20/pour-manuel-valls-il-existe-un-ap... All translations from French are by the author of this article.
[5] *Libération*, 'Le jour où Manuel Valls parla de "guerre de civilisation"', 28 June 2015. http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2015/06/28/le-jour-ou-manuel-valls-parla-de-guerre-d....

no room for nuance as Prime Minister Valls put forward a security response in line with the expectations of his fellow-citizens. The time for considered reflections on the possible consequences of the social apartheid in France had gone. Instead, as Valls informed the National Assembly, whatever difficulties there might be in the country's less privileged neighbourhoods, they did not offer 'the slightest excuse or the slightest justification for what had happened'. It was his colleague in government, Environment Minister Ségolène Royal, who succinctly summed up the view of the vast majority of the political elite in France: 'You cannot hold the French Republic responsible'.[6] Mirroring the individual equivocations of Manuel Valls was a constitutional debate that raised questions over the very nature and purpose of the Republic, and its relationship with its citizens. Mindful of the public sensitivity to the origins of those responsible for the terrorist outrages on French soil during 2015, President François Hollande responded to the popular sentiment that the Republic could not accommodate divided loyalties. In the aftermath of the attack on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* by Chérif and Saïd Kouachi, there was a focus on their Algerian origins, especially by the far right, pushing the argument that if they had not been allowed to enjoy French as well as Algerian citizenship they might not have had the opportunity or motivation to commit their crime. In fact, the Kouachi brothers were born in France and enjoyed French citizenship only. But the idea of stripping terrorists of their citizenship was now a matter for debate and gaining traction. Three days after the terrorist attacks of November 13, President Hollande announced his intention to steer through a constitutional reform that would allow his administration to strip French nationality from those with dual citizenship who were found guilty of terrorist crimes. Four days later, the jurist Jacques Toubon expressed the first serious reservations about this proposal, suggesting that it risked creating two categories of citizens. On December 15 Valls himself called for prudence and questioned whether such a major change was necessary for the sake of three or four terrorists. However, after the pronouncement of the *Conseil d'Etat* (which rules on the legality of administrative decisions), on December 17, that the reform proposed by Hollande was not incompatible with France's commitments under international law, Valls changed tack once more. On 27 January 2016, appearing before the National Assembly's legislative commission, Valls declared his support for Hollande's proposal but argued that in order not to appear to stigmatise anyone with dual citizenship, the measure could apply to anyone convicted of terrorism.

The ethical and legal gyrations that had started at the top of the Republic's executive would now make themselves felt with ever greater force through the rest of the political elite, notably in the governing party, prompting along the way the resignation of the Justice Minister, Christiane Taubira. Finally, on February 10 a majority in the National Assembly voted through Hollande's proposal with the change underlined by Valls, in order to pre-empt any accusation of discrimination, notwithstanding the widespread anxiety that France was not respecting international conventions against the creation of stateless persons. On March 22, the French Senate appeared to endorse the reform voted through by the lower chamber, but added an amendment making it applicable only to those with dual citizenship. Since, therefore, they had given their approval to a text that differed crucially from that approved by the Deputies in the Assembly, their endorsement was legally invalid and Hollande's proposal had effectively been sent back to square one. In short, the executive, the legislature and the whole apparatus of state

[6] Corinne, Lhaïk, 'Mais où est passé l'apartheid?', *L'Express*, 9 December 2015.

had made themselves the increasingly discredited victims of their own contortions, forcing President Hollande to bring the embarrassing episode to an end on March 30, when he announced that there would be no extraordinary congress of both houses in Versailles to ratify the constitutional change he had proposed.[7]

Within weeks of her resignation in January 2016, former Justice Minister, Christiane Taubira, published an essay which set out her thinking, not just on the legal implications of what had been proposed by President Hollande, but more broadly on the challenge posed to French society by the terrorism occurring on, and emanating from its borders, due to the 600 or so young French citizens who had gone to fight for Daech. For Taubira, France had to adjust to the sobering reality that the principal incubators for the terrorism the country was enduring were to be found in France itself. As for the proposal to strip French citizenship from those found guilty of such crimes, should they possess it, Taubira's objection rested on two points: one legal and one ethical. In the first instance, Taubira shared the anxiety expressed by other jurists that France could not act within the international legal framework to which it subscribed by creating stateless individuals. Secondly, the idea that the deprivation of citizenship could somehow become more acceptable if it was non-discriminatory, by applying to dual and single nationals equally, was symptomatic of how confused the understanding of equality had become in the minds of the political elite. Cutting to the heart of what the Republic is supposed to represent, Taubira put it thus: 'Whereas equality raises everybody up to the same level of rights and freedoms, this egalitarianism is the worst kind of levelling down'.[8] Her observation would be equally telling when applied to the reactions to the terrorist outrage in Nice, and particularly the ensuing debate over the wearing of the 'burkini'.

The attack on civil society on 14 July 2016, when French citizens were supposed to be celebrating the revolution that led to the birth of their Republic, had arguably an even more devastating effect than the attacks of 13 November 2015, due to the large number of child victims. The decision by Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel to drive a lorry down the Promenade des Anglais in Nice mowing down the people strolling there, resulted in 86 dead and hundreds injured. At the level of national government, the result was to entrench further the state of emergency. At local government level, there was a knee-jerk reaction that illustrated the confusion as to what kind of equality the Republic stood for. Within weeks of the Nice attack, as the summer holiday season reached its height, dozens of local councils had banned the all-enveloping women's swimsuit or 'burkini' from their beaches, under the pretext of avoiding the kind of provocations that might constitute a risk to public order. The parties controlling the municipalities cut across the political spectrum, from the far right bastions of the French Riviera to the socialist fiefdoms of the Pas-de-Calais. The governing party itself was riven with divisions over the issue. While Prime Minister Valls repeated his support for the mayors having issued the banning orders, some of his ministers reminded him what the values of the Republic stood for. Health Minister Marisol Touraine argued that: 'the values of the Republic are precisely those that allow everyone not to deny their identity…secularism is not the rejection of religion: it's a guarantee of individual and collective freedom'.[9]

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[7] *Lefigaro.fr*, 'Déchéance de nationalité: un abandon en six actes', 30 March 2016. http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/2016/03/30/25001-20160330ARTFIG00296-...

[8] Christiane Taubira, *Murmures à la jeunesse* (Paris: Philippe Rey 2016), 34.

[9] *Lefigaro.fr*, 'Burkini: Valls attire les foudres de ses ministres', 25 August 2016. http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/citations/2016/08/25/25002-20160825ARTF1...

If some had hoped that President Hollande would heal the divisions by exercising his authority as the ultimate protector of the Republic's values, he remained notably non-committal, counselling all concerned to 'avoid both provocation and stigmatisation'.[10] Petitioned by the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* and the *Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France*, at the end of August the *Conseil d'Etat* handed down a judgement against one of the municipalities in question which would force the others into line. It found that the banning order passed by the council of Villeneuve-Loubet was a serious and manifestly illegal attack on fundamental freedoms represented by the freedom of movement, freedom of conscience and the freedom of the individual. But for Prime Minister Valls, this judgement was not the end of the debate and he posted the following opinion on his Facebook page: 'condemning the burkini is in no way a threat to the freedom of the individual. There is no freedom which restrains women! It's the condemnation of an Islamism which is deathly and retrograde…the burkini is not a religious symbol, it's the affirmation of Islamist politics in the public space'.[11]

One step forward and two steps back

The poorly conceived and articulated responses to the terror threat from the governing socialists, centrally and locally, was not purely a failure of the left. The socialists, like the preceding centre-right administration, were driven to adopt contradictory positions by the inability to develop a convincingly inclusive notion of membership with regard to the national community, especially for individuals of non-European origin. By the time of his pronouncements on the Burkini affair, Valls seemed to have reversed his position on the implications of social segregation in France. From an acknowledgement of the need to look inwards, the focus was now unequivocally outwards. What some commentators had perceived as the *droitisation* or move to the right of the socialist government on issues of economic and foreign policy (especially in the light of French military interventions in the Sahel region of Africa), could now be applied to social and law and order issues. A de facto permanent state of emergency mirrored a key demand of the right, and the fact that Prime Minister Valls' pronouncements on integration (or the lack of it) appeared to echo those of the former centre-right President, Nicolas Sarkozy, illustrated the shared reflexes of both left and right. Sarkozy too had seen France shaken by violence in the prelude to his presidency, and the way it unfolded made the acknowledgement of its origins in France unavoidable, even for a centre-right figure like him.

The history of urban France is punctuated by rioting, most dramatically after World War II during the Algerian conflict and then the student-led uprising of May '68. In recent decades there has been a pattern of rioting in communities where the young in particular have felt themselves to be subject to victimisation by the police. The ensuing violence, for example in the high rise estates of Les Minguettes in 1981 and Vaulx-en-Velin in 1990 grabbed national headlines but were contained within municipal boundaries. The riots that erupted in 2005, however, were remarkable for the way they transcended city and regional boundaries, becoming a national phenomenon. The three weeks of rioting, involving chiefly young people from the French *Maghrebin* and African community, lasted from October to mid-November and pushed the government of Dominique de Villepin to resort to curfews, which was a measure that had not been adopted since the Algerian war. During one night at the height of

[10] *Lefigaro.fr*, 'Burkini: Hamon demande à Hollande de "mettre un terme à la derive" de Valls', 26 August 2016. http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/citations/2016/08/26/25002-20160826ARTF1...
[11] *Lefigaro.fr*, 'Le Conseil d'Etat suspend un arrêté anti-burkini à Villeneuve-Loubet', 26 August 2016. http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2016/08/26/01016-20160826ARFT1G00207-le...

the violence, over 1,400 cars were set on fire, and by the time peace had been definitively restored to the streets, the Ministry of the Interior calculated that over 10,000 vehicles has been burned and hundreds of building damaged.[12]

The echo of these events helped modulate Sarkozy's campaign in the run-up to the presidential elections of 2007. He positioned himself as the candidate best able to understand those communities who felt isolated because of their immigrant origins. He was, he proclaimed, the son of immigrants, with a father from Hungary and a grandfather who was a Jew from Salonika. Furthermore, he purported to understand 'the fear of tomorrow' that material insecurity brings, due to having been brought up by his mother alone after the break-up of her marriage.[13] In the administration that followed his election victory the French people were presented for the first time with three female government ministers from the country's minority communities: Rachida Dati with the portfolio for Justice and Fadela Amara with Urban Policy were both of North African origin, and Rama Yade as Junior Minister for Human Rights was born of Senegalese parents who had moved to France when she was 11 years old. These appointments were a bold decision that certainly wrong-footed the critics of the centre-right administration. For others, like the antiracist group *Les indigènes de la République* ('The natives of the Republic'), the move could only be cosmetic, promoting a select few in order to persuade people that the Republic had fulfilled its egalitarian vocation.[14] Nonetheless, Sarkozy continued to confound his adversaries, by taking the rare step of acknowledging the right of Muslims to be visibly Muslim, instead of melting indistinguishably into that collective national entity embodied by the 'one and indivisible Republic'. More particularly, he called into question the conventional understanding of *laïcité*, that specifically French institutionalisation of secularism that posits the separation of Church and State, as enshrined by the legislation of 1905. In practice, this has been interpreted as placing the State and its institutions under a strict obligation of neutrality, most notably in the sphere of state education where the promotion of a religious affiliation is legally prohibited. In contrast to the political elite in general, Sarkozy implicitly conceded that the traditional republican attitude to faith had been too narrow and put forward what he called a positive *laïcité*. This would be, as he saw it: '…a form of *laïcité* that guarantees the right to live one's religion as a fundamental human right. *Laïcité* is not the enemy of religions, quite the opposite: it guarantees that everyone can believe in God and live their faith'.[15] It was Sarkozy as Interior Minister who had provided the final push in 2003 for the creation of a state-sponsored *Conseil Français du Culte Musulman* (French Council for the Muslim Faith), and in an official visit to the Vatican in his capacity as head of state in 2007, he professed the belief that a schoolteacher could never equal a priest or a pastor in helping young people to learn to distinguish between good and evil.[16]

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[12] Matthew Moran, *The Republic and the Riots. Exploring Urban Violence in French Suburbs, 2005-2007* (Oxford: Peter Lang 2012), 15.

[13] Amélie Dalmazzo, 'Figures du leadership, regards des publics: les stratégies d'image des candidats face aux perceptions des publics', in Isabelle Veyrat-Masson (ed.), *Médias et élections: la campagne de 2007 et sa réception* (Paris: L'Harmattan 2011) 45.

[14] Réjane Sénac-Slawinsky, 'De la parité à la diversité: entre Deuxième sexe et discrimination seconde', *Modern and Contemporary France*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2010, 431-44.

[15] Alain Duhamel, *La marche consulaire* (Paris: Plon-Pocket 2009), 91.

[16] Nicolas Sarkozy, 'Discours de Nicolas Sarkozy au Palais de Latran – Visite officielle du Vatican', 21 December 2007. http://www.france.catholique.fr/Discours-de-Nicolas-Sarkozy-au.html.

The endorsement by Sarkozy of the right to be visible in terms of one's faith was, however, two-edged. For some commentators, reducing the citizen or groups of citizens to one defining trait, such as their religious affiliation, carried significant risk.[17] Whatever positive connotations were associated with it could be transformed into negative ones as different concerns crept up the political agenda, allowing the perception of certain communities to be broken down into competing component parts as opposed to the recognition that individuals are a complex of traits and loyalties. Thus, as Sarkozy's presidency wore on and unemployment failed to recede, a generalised sense of insecurity continued to rise, and the far right made inroads into the votes of a disillusioned centre-right electorate, he began to prepare the bid for a second mandate by lining up the themes of immigration, nationality and identity in antagonistic terms. In 2010 he advocated the stripping of French citizenship from individuals with dual nationality convicted of criminal acts and a tightening of access to citizenship for the 16-18 age group. In a speech in Grenoble, quoted at length in France's leading daily *Le Monde* on 5 August 2010, Sarkozy bemoaned the consequences of fifty years of unregulated immigration and underlined, in his view, the link between immigration and delinquency. Given the urban areas where immigrant communities and high levels of delinquency were concentrated, those faith communities that had seemed to benefit from presidential esteem were once more in the firing line. Although Sarkozy's proposals failed to get through the Senate, a pattern of self-defeating attempts to impose a reductive view of fidelity to the Republic was reinforced.

At the same time as Manuel Valls and his colleagues were arguing that the Republic could not be held to blame for the actions of those who carried out the attacks of November 13, in a speech in Avignon Sarkozy suggested that there was only one way of belonging to the Republic. A positive sense of French identity could not be reconciled with multiculturalism: 'France is not a supermarket where you choose what suits you. France is a package and you adopt it as such and make your contribution to it. If you don't like it, you're not French'.[18] This perspective became more fixed in successive speeches and at a meeting in Perpignan on 24 September 2016, Sarkozy praised those who had been assimilated into the bosom of the Republic, such as those Algerian Muslim troops who had fought for France in the Algerian war. They, like the African troops who had fought for the liberation of France in World War II, had become part of the Republic's proud identity because: 'as soon as you become French, your ancestors are the Gauls'.[19]

The terms in which Sarkozy framed his argument turned the clock back more than half a century, to the time when Roland Barthes was exploring the mythologies that taught those subject to France's civilising mission overseas to adopt the refrain, *nos ancêtres les Gaulois* ('our ancestors the Gauls'). But whereas Barthes identified a belief system that sought to deploy its 'mythical significations' anonymously,[20] figures on the right and left of French politics now

[17] Hervé Lebègue and Tobie Nathan, 'A l'UMP, le dévot Sarko n'a pas que des fidèles', *Libération*, 4 November 2004.
[18] *Libération*, 'Sarkozy: Pas d'identité française heureuse dans une société devenue multiculturelle', 26 November 2015. http://www.liberation.fr/france/2015/11/26/sarkozy-pas-d-indentite-francaise-heureuse-...
[19] *Lemonde.fr*, 'Pour Nicolas Sarkozy, nos ancêtres étaient les Gaulois mais aussi "les tirailleurs musulmans"', 24 September 2016. http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2016/09/24/pour-nicolas-s...

[20] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil 1957), 246.

attempt to mobilise the mythical power of the Republic in a transparent manner, and in the face of widespread opposition. In the light of the growing and obvious limitations of this approach, the questions arises as to why the elites as a whole in France appear incapable of articulating a more intellectually creative response to the challenge of social cohesion.

Fear and self-loathing: a crisis of cultural self-confidence

The focus on France was sharpened after the riots of 2005 and particularly on the reasons why a country historically perceived to be so rich in cultural capital seemed to nurture such a deep sense of deprivation among sections of its society. When, in November 2007, *Time* magazine's European correspondent, Donald Morrison, chronicled what he saw as the decline of France's cultural influence, this sparked a debate which resulted in the famously provocative cover of *Time* magazine's European edition on 7 December 2007 proclaiming the death of French culture. A vigorous debate ensued as French intellectuals took up arms against what was perceived as a typically trans-Atlantic attempt to belittle France as inward-looking and timid in its engagement with a globalised society.[21] The reaction in France was conditioned to a degree by the cyclical anti-Americanism that is a feature of the relationship between the two countries. This anti-American sentiment gained ground in France as the collapse of the Soviet Union gave French elites greater scope to criticize the American way, especially the emergence of that country as a hyper-power that seemed determined to impose the new ideology of globalization on the rest of the world.[22]

In reality, however, Morrison was doing something that was already familiar but less shocking to the French when it came from one of their own. By the time the obituaries for a once great French culture were appearing in the trans-Atlantic press, there had been so many home-grown analyses charting the decline of the country that a term had been coined to describe it: *déclinologie*. The ambient sense of despair was caught in an essay of modest length that was widely and hotly debated. Entitled *La France qui tombe* (France in Decline), the essay pointed the finger at the institutional paralysis of the public sphere, and in particular the osmosis between governing, administrative and union elites resulting in the capture of power in the Republic and the ensuing disinclination to countenance change. Genuine decision-making was thus replaced by the imperative of communication and, at worst, demagogic discourses over issues such as the integration of minorities.[23] In social terms, the refusal to act meaningfully to tackle the problems in the *quartiers sensibles* or sensitive neighbourhoods had vacated the space for those organisations willing to step in with unofficial forms of welfare, sometimes at the price of fostering sectarian loyalties that were anathema to the values of the Republic. This theme of the divorce between the Republic and some of those it had sought to integrate was amplified by a number of France's most popular established thinkers or aspiring intellectuals whose essays sold in their hundreds of thousands and who all, in one way or another, exploited a culture of anxiety.

Arguably the most alarmist text to gain wide publicity was one which predicted the substitution of the indigenous people of France by a population principally from the Maghreb and sub-

[21] Donald Morrison and Antoine Compagnon, *The Death of French Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2010).

[22] Richard Kuisel, *The French Way. How France Embraced and Rejected American Values and Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2012).

[23] Nicolas Bavarez, *La France qui tombe*, (Paris: Perrin 2003).

Saharan Africa. In his 76-page essay Renaud Camus deploys what is, in essence, a conspiracy theory that blames the political, media and cultural elites of Europe as well as France, for treating indigenous Europeans with contempt.[24] Successive governments of France, according to Camus, opened the door to mass migration to complete a three-fold process of dismemberment which led to the loss of France's industrial base, its spiritual character and its cultural identity. The reaction among academics was to point out the utter lack of originality in Camus's purported thesis. Documented fears of the substitution of the French population by migrant groups went back to the end of the nineteenth century, focusing then on the arrival of Armenians and Jews, and were to recur in every period of crisis in the Republic's history. Intellectuals with a high media profile such as Alain Finkielkraut deplored Camus' thesis, but at the same time refused to acknowledge the obvious link between Camus' warning of a catastrophic demographic change, and their own warnings of the dangers to the survival of France's culture. In his own essay on France's unhappy sense of identity, Finkielkraut warns of the 'dizzying effects of disidentification'.[25] He sees a post-Holocaust and post-colonial Europe that, in its determination to obliterate the motivations behind those injustices from the constituent elements of its new identity, also expunges the positive specificities of its traditional sense of identity. Now European and French identity have to be defined by those who come to it, instead of those within it, and in France's case, by those whose identities and communities had been repressed during the course of France's colonial history. For some of Finkielkraut's critics, he had found a more subtle way of drawing the same antagonistic distinction as others, like Camus, between *Français de souche* or indigenous French, and *immigrés de seconde génération*, or second-generation immigrants. In short, there was a difference in degree, rather than in kind, between Camus' fear of reverse colonization and Finkielkraut's anxiety over a post-colonial loss of faith in France's sense of identity.

During the year prior to the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, one of the most familiar figures on French screens and airwaves was Eric Zemmour, whose lengthy rumination on the state of the country, *Le Suicide Français* has been a runaway success, selling over half a million copies up to that point. Catching the anti-elite, populist mood sweeping the country and the continent, Zemmour indicted all those political, media, artistic and other elites who he believed had connived in the *déculturation* of France, depriving its people of a sense of national memory and breaking their sense of national unity through immigration. In his analysis, Zemmour holds up the triumph of France's football team in the 1998 World Cup as an example of the illusion of multiculturalism that had been foisted on the French people. The victory was almost universally lauded by the elites as a testament to the new France arising out of post-war immigration, particularly since the 1950s and 1960s. The team was symbolic of *la France black-blanc-beur*, the successful union of young people of sub-Saharan, indigenous French and North African origins. Only, for Zemmour, the generalised sense of euphoria masked a more dangerous reality for France that would be illustrated once more on what should have been football's field of dreams. In 2001, what was meant to be a celebratory friendly match between France and Algeria rapidly degenerated into the opposite. In front of the then Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, the prelude to the match was marked by the loud jeering of the French national anthem by young French people largely of North African parentage, who had come to the national stadium from the impoverished periphery of Paris. They even jeered France's *beur* captain, Zinedine Zidane,

[24] Renaud Camus, *Le Grand Remplacement* (Paris: David Reinharc 2011).
[25] Alain Finkielkraut, *L'identité malheureuse* (Paris: Gallimard 2013), 83.

when he touched the ball because of his alleged betrayal of his North African roots by playing for France. The evening was brought to a depressing end at the close of the match by a pitch invasion on the part of the same disaffected youths who had occupied the stands. Summing up the evening, as Zemmour saw it: 'The illusion of *black-blanc-beur* France had been shattered; the ideological anti-racist con-trick had been unmasked'.[26]

Zemmour and others sharing his perspective should have been cheered therefore by the extraordinary mobilisation following the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, under the slogan of *Je suis Charlie* ('I am Charlie'), which seemed to restore a unified sense of national purpose, memory and shared commitment to the values that had shaped the Republic. There were, however, a few well-known intellectual voices that refused to subscribe to this consensus, notably one of the best-known historians of modern France, Emmanuel Todd. In his trenchant analysis of the *Je suis Charlie* movement that swept the country and was echoed abroad, Todd describes it as 'an emblematic demonstration of bad faith'.[27] Todd observes, as few dared to, at the height of the republican fervour, that there were significant sections of French society who did not consider themselves *Charlie,* such as the suburban youth and the provincial workers who were noticeable by their absence from the mass demonstrations of solidarity. He takes to task the compulsory secularism that misunderstands the triumph of anti-clericalism that occurred under the Third Republic, leading to the *laïcité* that became a defining characteristic of subsequent French republics. The obligation of *laïcité* has become a new religion binding people together through the imposition of a uniform view of what it is to be a French citizen because of an erroneous grasp of what the Third Republic was. For Todd, it was the result of a communitarian pragmatism, successfully combining the agnosticism at the centre with the masses on the periphery who had remained loyal to the Catholic faith. Consequently, the Third Republic was a 'pluricultural' society that accommodated the need for the individual to fulfil him or herself as they wished. In contrast, according to Todd, what prevails in the Fifth Republic is a 'neo-republican' discourse that imposes *laïcité* and demands unanimity.

In contrast to Zemmour, however, and the sense of fear that his analysis and that of others betray, the vehement turn taken by Todd's excoriation of his society expresses a sense of French self-loathing. For Todd, the true source of the destructive tensions in France is the 'zombie Catholicism' of the middle classes concentrated in the provinces. The traditional practice of Catholicism might have largely died out by the 1990s, but the residual mind-set left those populations susceptible to the substitute religion of militant secularism. This religious reflex has, among other things, engendered a narrow nationalism that sharpened the need of the middle classes to search for new scapegoats (after the *petit bourgeois* transformation of the working class). This 'zombie Catholicism' has colonised and taken over the political centre ground and even infected France's European vocation. The pursuit of monetary union, for Todd, was the result of the search for a new object of faith, making the Euro the new golden calf whose worship has inflicted such pain on the ordinary working people of southern Europe. But where the sense of French self-loathing is most detrimental to an objective analysis is when Todd compares the 'neo-Republicanism' of the current Republic to what obtained under the Vichy state.

[26] Eric Zemmour, *Le Suicide Français* (Paris: Albin Michel 2014), 429.

[27] Emmanuel Todd*, Qui est Charlie? Sociologie d'une crise religieuse* (Paris: Seuil 2015), 18.

Conclusion

As this article has illustrated, terrorist outrages in France have left the country's political elite struggling to articulate a response that unites rather than divides the national community. Furthermore, the traditional assumptions made by French republican ideology about the nature of a collective sense of identity and belonging no longer provide a stable platform for a once confident feeling of cultural self-esteem. After the shock of the terrorist attacks of November 2015, a searching intellectual gaze from abroad was once more trained on France and those whore mission it has been, since the Dreyfus Affair, to defend the vocation of the Republic. For the Francophone Israeli philosopher, Shlomo Sand, the ideas of current thinkers are deprived of the universal reach of figures like Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Raymond Aron and Michel Foucault.[28] Contemporary French intellectuals benefit from the cultural domination of Paris and the concentration of media opportunities it offers, and as their media performances multiply, along with the potential sales of their works, so their critical perspectives adapt to the simple binary oppositions characteristic of media-driven analyses. They have become the evangelists of a secular orthodoxy for the digital age, what the sociologist Serge Daney termed a *télé-clergé*.[29] According to Sand, to argue, as does a leading intellectual like Alain Finkielkraut, that Islam represents a danger to French culture, is not to frame an intellectual critique but to target a section of the population that sits at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. It is as if the would-be defenders of the Republic have lost the lexical dexterity to prevent their discourse from unravelling. For the foreign-based French philosopher Philippe-Joseph Salazar, the elites in France seem to have lost a stable sense of what language to use to describe the threat they perceive from a radicalised Islam. In what he terms a 'rhetorical panic',[30] he describes how the fixation with terrorism has destabilised the linguistic resources of the Republic and left it incapable of framing a cogent and persuasive response to that threat. The uncertain use of terms like 'Islamist' and 'Islamic', the varying acronyms used to designate terrorist organisations, and the inconsistent attempts to make them sound Arab (sometimes 'Daech' and at other times 'Daesch'), reflect the failure of the Republic's linguistic authority and the vocation that accompanies it. But while this critique addresses mainly the struggle against terrorism, it could also apply to the language used to identify troubled suburbs and those who live in them. Are they *zones urbaines prioritaires* ('urban priority areas'), or *quartiers sensibles* ('sensitive neighbourhoods'), or *banlieues en difficulté* ('suburbs in difficulty'); and are they inhabited by *Arabes*, *Beurs*, or other communities often designated as *issues de l'immigration* ('resulting from immigration')? This frequent semantic slippage, one could argue, is also indicative of an uncertain relationship with the Republic and is intimately linked with the articulation of the perceived threat to it. Perhaps the time has come for the defenders of the French Republic to resist the instinctive *laïcard* or secularist reflex that designates, defines and differentiates minority communities and cultures, and instead opt to

[28] Shlomo Sand, *La Fin de l'intellectuel français?* (Paris: La Découverte 2016).
[29] Gino Raymond, *The French Communist Party During the Fifth Republic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2005), 156.
[30] Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *Paroles armées. Comprendre et combattre la propaganda terroriste* (Paris: Lemieux 2012), 63.

defuse the antagonisms that trouble France by recognising a right which is actually implicit in the legislation of 1905 separating church and state; the 'right to indifference'.[31]

[31] Mayanthi L. Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press 2014), 79.